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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 001515

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN MUSLIMS RALLY AGAINST TERRORISM, AGAIN

REF: NEW DELHI 623

Classified By: A/PolCouns Joel Ehrendreich for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Leading Indian Muslim clerics denounced terrorism as un-Islamic at two separate, very different events over the May 31-June 1 weekend. Seizing the political upper hand, the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) publicly welcomed the events and focused on their anti-government sentiments. The BJP senses that terrorism will be a winning issue for them in the coming national elections, and took the opportunity to bash the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) for having "completely failed" to tackle terror. Over the last several months, numerous Muslim clerics have publicly condemned terrorism. Their comments tend to follow a familiar line: condemn terrorism as un-Islamic, denounce authorities for indiscriminately targeting all Muslims, and throw in plenty of anti-US, anti-Israel rhetoric for good measure. The anti-terror declarations are helpful, to the extent they create an increasingly larger community of people who agree violence is not acceptable. But deadly acts such as the recent Jaipur blasts require only rudimentary bombs and a handful of committed individuals (in a country of 1.1 billion). Terrorism is an incumbent government's problem, and the BJP will ensure the Congress Party's "failings" remain center stage from now until election day. End Summary.

"Mass" Rally

¶2. (U) At a rally on May 31, clerics from Darul Uloom Deoband officially issued a fatwa against terrorism. The fatwa read, "Islam is a religion of peace and security. In its eyes, on any part over the surface of the earth, spreading mischief, rioting, breach of peace, bloodshed, killing of innocent persons and plundering are the most inhuman crimes." Mahmood Asad Madani, JUH leader and Uttar Pradesh Rajya Sabha MP, along with Deoband's Rector Marghoobur Rehman and Deputy Rector Qari Syed Mohammad Usman presided over the conclave. According to Embassy personnel at the rally, the crowd cheered enthusiastically when Usman condemned "the dual policy of America," and stated, "Whenever Christian and American interests are hurt in any part of the world, they take prompt action to set things right, even at the cost of human lives. They maintain silence though, when Muslims are victims." While organizers had hoped for 500,000 people, attendance was closer to 50,000, not a particularly large gathering for

India.

Formal Conference

13. (U) On June 1, New Delhi's prominent Jama Masjid hosted religious and political leaders from around the region for a more staid affair to discuss terrorism and how to best counter it. High-level conference attendees including the Dalai Lama, the Archbishop of Delhi, UPA Science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh took turns denouncing terrorism. The Dalai Lama lauded India's religious diversity, telling the gathering, "India's long tradition of religious tolerance can be a role model for the rest of the world." Minister Sibal said terrorism "knows no boundaries, we need global cooperation and understanding to check it." Ever the politician, he added, "Making it an electoral issue will encourage terrorists." Not heeding this call, conference organizer and Jama Masjid Imam, Syed Ahmad Bukhari lashed out at the Gujarat BJP Chief Minister declaring, "Narendra Modi is terrorist number one in the country."

BJP Sees a Winning Issue...

14. (U) The BJP was quick to laud the Deoband sponsored rally and could not resist using the event to attack the Congress Party. BJP President Rajnath Singh, speaking at the party's national executive meeting, complimented Deoband for its

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anti-terror fatwa and accused the UPA of "wanting to equate Muslims with terrorism." He said the UPA had "completely failed" to tackle terrorism and repeated BJP calls for new prevention of terrorism legislation. Imam Bukhari's comments about Chief Minister Modi were not addressed.

...That's Not Likely to Go Away

15. (C) Comment: The chorus of Muslim voices against terror has swelled in recent months. In equal measure (if not more so) those voices have also criticized the GOI for indiscriminately harassing and arresting innocent Muslims whenever an incident occurs - every several months for the last few years. This puts the weakening Congress Party in a tight spot. The Muslim vote is up for grabs as regional parties such as the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party erode this once loyal Congress Party vote bank. The Congress can talk tough on terror, but the party will not take any significant actions, such as enacting new prevention of terrorism legislation, for fear of losing more Muslim voters. Meanwhile, the BJP will take any opportunity to criticize the UPA on its "failed" terrorism record. The BJP smells victory in the upcoming national elections, and terrorism is a major plank in their electoral platform. Between now and the May 2009 elections, terrorism will continue, condemnations will continue, and the likely political fallout will be positive for the BJP and negative for the Congress. End Comment.
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